

# *Report*

# Tonto National Monument

## ■ 1.0 Site Description

The Tonto National Monument (Monument) was established in 1907 to preserve cliff dwellings and associated Sonoran desert environment where people of the Salado culture lived during the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and early 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Monument is located approximately two hours northeast of Phoenix, Arizona on 1,120 acres in south-central Arizona. Access is provided off of State Highway 188. Tonto National Forest surrounds the Monument, with Roosevelt Lake located to the north (See Figure 1).

Two pueblos of the prehistoric Salado culture are preserved at the Monument. These pueblos are apartment-style dwellings constructed by bonding rocks with mud and are located within erosion-formed recesses of a hillside (see Figure 2). The Lower Cliff-dwelling consists of 16 ground floor rooms next to a 12-room annex. The Upper Ruin is a larger 32-room structure located on a nearby ridge.

Facilities at the Monument are described below:

- **Visitor Center** – Located one mile inside the Monument entrance via a narrow, steep road, the Visitor Center has parking for 52 cars and three recreational vehicle (RV) spaces. The Visitor Center, constructed in the 1960s, is eligible for nomination to the National Register for Historic Places for its architectural significance.
- **Picnic Area** – The picnic area is located one-half mile below the Visitor Center and consists of eight tables and restroom facilities. One to two RV parking spaces are also located in this area.
- **Trails** – There are two trails within the Monument: the Lower Cliff-dwelling and Upper Cliff-dwelling.
  - **Lower Cliff-dwelling Trail** ascends 350 feet and is a paved one-half-mile trail with interpretive signs for self-guided tours.
  - **Upper Cliff-dwelling Trail** ascends 600 feet and is a 1.5-mile dirt and rock trail for ranger-guided tours. Guided tours are provided of the Upper Cliff-dwelling four times per week for groups of 15 persons from November through April. The tour requires advance reservations and often fills up weeks in advance.

Figure 1. Vicinity Map



Figure 2. Pueblos



The Monument is open daily from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., except Christmas Day. The entrance fee for the Monument is \$4.00 per vehicle or \$2.00 per bicycle or pedestrian. Approximately 80,000 persons visit the Monument annually, with January through mid-April the peak visitation period. Peak daily visitation averages approximately 600 persons. Nearly all the visitors arrive via private vehicle, with the exception of approximately 12 tour buses per year and occasional 20- to 25-passenger buses transporting educational groups. Generally visitors to the Lower Cliff-dwelling stay one to two hours and visitors to the Upper Cliff-dwelling stay three to four hours. Many of the visitors stay at area campgrounds in the Tonto National Forest. Over the past three to four years, seven new camping areas with 2,100 sites were opened in the Tonto National Forest to replace campsites that were flooded when the height of Roosevelt Dam was raised. The Superintendent anticipates a 25 percent increase in annual visitation due to the opening of additional campsites and completion of area roadway improvement projects.

## ■ 2.0 Existing ATS

An Alternative Transportation System (ATS) currently in use is a shuttle van, which is used during very busy periods. Monument Open houses are held three times per year. During these open houses, visitation increases nearly threefold to approximately 1,600 persons. A kiosk to collect entrance fees is opened during open house events. This kiosk is located along the access road one-half mile inside the Monument from State Highway 188. Once the parking lot at the Visitor Center fills, visitors have the option of parking along the Monument access road and riding a nine-passenger shuttle van to the Visitor Center.

## ■ 3.0 ATS Needs

Under the current configuration of the Monument, additional ATS is not required. However, a General Management Plan (GMP) is currently being prepared that will most likely recommend a new Visitor Center and larger parking area closer to State Highway 188. The existing Visitor Center would most likely also remain in use as a staging area and on site contact for tours to the cliff dwellings and restroom facilities. Under this plan, an expanded shuttle system would be required to transport visitors between the new Visitor Center and the existing Visitor Center. Service would at first be demand responsive and expand to a regular scheduled service as demand warrants.

An external shuttle between area campgrounds and attractions and the Monument could also be established as visitor demand warrants. This shuttle would include van services connecting the three primary campground sites, the U.S. Forest Service Visitor Center, and the Monument Visitor Center.

## ■ 4.0 Basis of ATS Needs

An internal ATS has the potential to reduce the need to expand parking and roadway areas within the Monument near the historically significant Visitor Center and cliff dwellings. It can reduce the need for vehicles to drive the existing narrow, winding roadway to the Visitor Center. If these facilities were expanded, the natural and cultural landscape would be severely damaged. In addition, the ATS system can reduce the noise and vehicle emissions in the environmentally sensitive grounds of the Monument. Some form of interpretive program could be provided as part of the overall visitor experience. An external ATS has the potential to reduce overall parking requirements and could further enhance the visitor experience through an expanded interpretive program coordinated with the U.S. Forest Service.

## ■ 5.0 Bibliography

National Park Service. Draft General Management Plan, Park Purpose and Significance, Tonto National Monument, undated.

<http://www.nps.gov/tont/> (visited November 1, 1999).

<http://seamonkey.ed.asu.edu/storslee/kristi/salado.html> (visited November 1, 1999).

<http://www.desertusa.com/ton.html> (visited November 20, 1999).

## ■ 6.0 Persons Interviewed

Elias (Lee) Baiza, Superintendent, Tonto National Monument